

OPEN LETTERS.

An American Year-book of Botany.¹

In the July number of the GAZETTE Mr. J. Christian Bay has given an outline of a proposed bibliography of American botany. Owing to the extreme importance of any measure likely to facilitate bibliographic research, I have ventured to make a few comments on the work contemplated. Mr. Bay alludes to the value of Just's Botanischer Jahresbericht and to its supposed neglect of American botanical literature. Now I contend that the neglect is not on the part of the editors of the Jahresbericht but on the part of the American botanists themselves in failing to send copies of their papers to Prof. E. Kœhne, the editor-in-chief. In the preface of vol. 18 for 1890, published in the last heft just received a few days ago, Prof. Kœhne notes some facts which may account for the little attention paid to American literature. In spite of the urgent request published in the preface of the previous volume and elsewhere calling on botanists and societies to send their publications, only the following journals and reports for 1890 were received from America:—An incomplete set of Bull. Torrey Bot. Club; Report Kansas State Agric. College; Journal of Mycology; Proceedings Interstate Convention of Cattlemen at Fort Worth, Texas; Transactions Kans. Acad. Sci.; Contributions from U. S. Nat. Herb.; Report Section Veg. Path., and Scientific Results of Explorations by the U. S. Fish Commission Steamer Albatross! That is to say, only an incomplete set of one private journal, the other six being published by the government. Of American botanists only the following sent papers: J. M. Coulter, F. V. Coville, Th. Holm, F. H. Knowlton, J. N. Rose, W. T. Swingle, S. Watson, and Geo. Vasey. That is, four from Washington, D. C., and four from other parts of the Union!

For 1889 only *three* journals or reports were sent—all published by the government,—and only *six* Americans sent papers! Is it any wonder that we all know "how little attention it pays to American literature!" Yet the facts indicated above do not show the worst phase of the matter. In Europe, thanks to the enterprise of R. Friedländer & Sohn in publishing *Naturæ Novitates* and to similar bulletins issued by booksellers in other countries, we are able to purchase at very reasonable cost any foreign book or paper almost as soon as issued. This is unfortunately not the case for America. Foreigners have the greatest difficulty in obtaining our works or even in learning what is issued. Cases are not rare where American botanists have purchased abroad the works of their own countrymen that by some fortunate chance had been placed on the market. This state of affairs makes it a hundred fold more difficult to obtain American publications abroad than it is for us to purchase the works of Europeans. If other countries should follow our example and start national year-books in their own tongue, in the end the very object aimed at would be defeated and greater confusion than ever would result. It might possibly be advantageous if a year-book giving a full account of the progress of botany in France were issued, but suppose Italy, Holland, Sweden, Hungary, Russia and

¹Though unavoidably much delayed in publication we deem the subject of this letter of such importance as to justify its appearance at this late day.—Eds.

Japan should follow suit! Yet every one of these countries publishes nearly as much, and several of them more, first class botanical work than is produced in America. How much good would it do American or German or French botanists to have an elaborate year-book in Russian, Polish, Hungarian or Japanese?

To Americans such a bibliography as that proposed by Mr. Bay would be of little value since they are generally well acquainted with the literature as it issues. To foreigners it would simply call for an extra expense to obtain in an unfamiliar tongue what they have a right to expect to find in *Botanisches Centralblatt* or *Bot. Jahresbericht*. If the year-book is to reach the widest circle of readers abroad; it should by all means be issued in German or French, or be translated as soon as possible after publication as are Famintzin's *Uebersichten über die Leistungen auf dem Gebiete der Botanik in Russland*.

It is very doubtful whether a publisher could be obtained for such a year-report in German or French unless the author would assume the financial responsibility.

If the work is to obtain the greatest confidence it should be conducted under the auspices of some society or association of recognized standing. Famintzin's reports mentioned above are published by order of the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg, the highest scientific body in Russia.

It seems very clear to me that the energy required to carry out the project outlined by Mr. Bay might be spent in some more profitable manner. For instance, prompt and full reviews of American papers might be sent to *Botanisches Centralblatt*, and authors wishing their papers noticed in *Botanischer Jahresbericht* could send copies of them to Prof. Kœhne. Of course some persons might feel aggrieved that their second or third rate paper did not receive a highly complimentary two-page notice and might long for a more sympathetic review organ of our own, yet such reasons are hardly sufficient to warrant the outlay of time and money proposed.

It should be remembered that outside of Germany purely bibliographic journals and reports have almost uniformly failed after a few years of precarious existence.

If then French and Italian botanists and American zoologists are able to do without such a year-book it seems quite probable that our own need of such a work is more fancied than real.—W. T. SWINGLE, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Subtropical Laboratory, Eustis, Florida.

NOTES AND NEWS.

PROF. J. E. HUMPHREY, formerly of the Agricultural Experiment Station of Massachusetts, intends to spend the coming year in Strasburger's laboratory at Bonn.

IN THE January number of the current volume of the *Forstlich-naturwissenschaftliche Zeitschrift* Dr. F. Ludwig describes a new slime flux caused by one of the discomycetes which he says is identical with *Ascobolus Costantini* Roll.—L. S. C.